



**Figure 1** Participant flow. PAS, patient administration system.

$p = 0.006$ ; mean (SD) cigarettes a day: interested in NRT ( $n = 67$ ) = 9.5 (6.3), not interested in NRT ( $n = 83$ ) = 7.1 (4.2)). Following current licensing regulations,<sup>1</sup> 39.3% (59/150) of the women wanting to stop smoking reported smoking sufficient cigarettes per day ( $\geq 10$ ) to be considered eligible for NRT. Interest in using NRT was significantly higher for those smoking at least 10 cigarettes a day ( $\chi^2$ :  $\chi = 5.0$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ; 10 or more cigarettes a day: interested in NRT = 55.9% (33/59), less than 10 cigarettes a day: interested in NRT = 37.4% (34/91)). Overall, 22% (33/150) of those reporting wanting to stop smoking were both interested in NRT and eligible for NRT.

The results indicate a high level of interest in stopping smoking among pregnant women still smoking following their first antenatal booking and a moderate level of interest in using NRT. Fewer women were recorded as smokers at their first antenatal visit than would be expected from national data.<sup>3</sup> This is likely to be because of the high number of Asian women in the local population. Encouragingly, those women who were heavier smokers, and were therefore eligible for NRT, showed most interest in NRT. Around a quarter of the smokers wanting to stop were both eligible for NRT and interested in using NRT. These findings add support to the argument for conducting further trials of NRT for pregnant smokers. The ultimate test of the acceptability of NRT for these women will be the degree to which NRT is utilised.

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Conflicts of interest: Robert West has previously been involved in research and consultancy sponsored by manufacturers of nicotine replacement therapy.

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## Voodoo cigarillos: bidis in disguise?

As part of its routine monitoring of emerging tobacco products, "Trinkets & trash: artifacts of the tobacco epidemic", a collection of current and historic tobacco marketing ([www.trinketsandtrash.org](http://www.trinketsandtrash.org)), recently identified a new tobacco product called Voodoo cigarillos. They are exclusively manufactured in India for the US based Kretek International, a specialty tobacco distributor whose exclusive product line includes Djarum clove cigarettes, Darshan bidis, and Dreams multi-coloured and flavoured cocktail cigarettes.<sup>1</sup> The Voodoo cigarillos we obtained were flavoured and, as with bidis, consisted of tobacco flakes wrapped in a leaf tied with a small string. Aside from a slightly larger and more uniform cylindrical shape, Voodoo cigarillos appear to be nearly identical to bidis (fig 1). Only the name on the package would identify it as a cigarillo. US federal regulations define a cigar as any roll of tobacco wrapped in leaf tobacco or in any substance containing tobacco.<sup>2</sup> Voodoo cigarillos appear to be wrapped in tendu leaf, which do not naturally contain tobacco.

So we ask, is this new product a cigarillo or a bidi with new packaging? Federal regulations define a cigarette as any roll of tobacco wrapped in paper or in any substance *not* containing tobacco.<sup>3</sup> The US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms previously concluded the bidi wrapper did not contain tobacco and, therefore, bidis were subject to the federal cigarette tax.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 1** Voodoo cigarillo and Darshan bidi.

The distinction between a cigarillo and a cigarette has important legal and financial implications. Since the wrapper of a cigarillo contains tobacco, cigarillos are taxed at the same rate as small cigars. In 2002, the US federal tax rate for small cigars was 4 cents per pack of 20, while the rate for cigarettes was 39 cents per pack of 20.<sup>5</sup> While all 50 states impose a tax on cigarettes, only 45 states impose a tax on cigars,<sup>6</sup> which are lower than their cigarette tax.<sup>7</sup> If Voodoo cigarillos are taxed at the rate of cigars, the lower federal and state taxes mean a higher profit margin for the merchant and/or lower prices for consumers.

In addition to tax differences, labelling the Voodoo product as a cigarillo has important consequences for their regulation. Several states have expanded their definition of tobacco products to include bidis, making sales to minors illegal. Illinois, Vermont, and West Virginia banned the sale of bidis completely.<sup>8</sup> More recently, California passed a bill prohibiting the sale, distribution or importation of bidis except by businesses that prohibit minors, such as bars and casinos.<sup>9</sup> Also, federal legislation to halt the importation of bidis into the USA was introduced in 2001.<sup>8</sup> By being sold as a cigar product, Voodoo cigarillos would get around the ban on bidi sales in some states.

This new product emerges at a time when bidi sales are vulnerable to increased regulation at the state, and possibly the federal level, as well as higher cigarette excise taxes in 19 states in 2002.<sup>7</sup> The Voodoo cigarillo may be a clever way for the tobacco industry to circumvent the regulations and restrictions imposed on bidis. Voodoo cigarillos should be reliably tested to determine if manufacturers and vendors are in compliance with federal and state laws.

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- 9 **California Penal Code 308.1.** Access date: October 2002. URL: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/calaw.html>

## Smoking in children's picture books

The other day, one of the authors went to a public library with his 3 year old daughter to read some picture books to her. Various picture books, from classic to newly published, were available. Classic books are her favourite. First, she chose a book portraying adventures of a naughty monkey named Curious George (by HA Rey). He came to an industrialised country with a man in a yellow hat. My daughter pointed to a picture of the man holding a pipe between his lips. A smoking scene in a picture book for small children!

The next book she chose depicted an elephant named Babar (by Jean De Brunhoff) that fled from his country to Europe after his mother was killed by men. After coming back to his country with western technologies, he changed elephant society into Western-style society and became a king. Again, the King Babar was holding a pipe.



The third book was depicting a monster named Barbapapa living with François' family (by Tison and Taylor). He had a mysterious ability to metamorphose into anything he desired. Unfortunately, in this attractive book, François' father was always holding a pipe. Another supporting character was smoking a cigar. Smoking seems to be a symbol of manhood in these children's picture books.

My daughter then opened books about Moominvalley (by Tove Jansson) and Tintin's

adventures (by Herge) in which some characters were smoking. Finally, I myself selected a book depicting Father Christmas (by Raymond Briggs). On Christmas Eve, Father Christmas delivered presents to children all over the world. After the labourious job, he took a rest smoking a cigar and a pipe.

Picture books reflect the norms or perceptions of our societies. These classic children's books were first published in times when smoking was not widely acknowledged as harmful and a smoking male adult was one of the sex stereotypes. In addition, pipe smoking seems acceptable in such picture books compared with cigars or cigarettes which are seldom seen.

Caregivers frequently read picture books aloud to children at home, kindergartens, or daycare centres, which may have a considerable influence on preschool children. Young children receive strong messages from pictures. Seeing adult males smoking in picture books, they may take it as a desirable behaviour.

It would be unacceptable to remove smoking scenes from these classic books or eliminate the books themselves. What we can do is to become aware of the potential influence of these books and take a negative attitude to smoking when we read to children. Fortunately, the man in a yellow hat seems to have quit smoking in the new series of George's adventures.

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Getting them while they're young in China. Submitted by Professor TH Lam, Hong Kong.